Indo-US Plan for Airstaff Exchange

2117. SHRI JIBON ROY: Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether attention of Government has been drawn to the titled news "India, U.S. plan airstaff exchange" published in the Hindustan Times (Delhi Edition) on 5th September, 2002; and

(b) in what way this will help India's defence system?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI GEORGE FERNANDES): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) Exchange programmes with other countries including the US, are part of an ongoing process, Such programmes help develop greater understanding of one another, expose IAF to latest technology and promote interoperability.

Auxiliary System of MIG-21

2118. SHRI RUMANDLA RAMACHANDRAIAH: Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether a top Air Force Official has apprehended that Auxiliary system of MIG-21 engine was suspect and could be the cause of crashes on 9th September, 2002;

(b) if so, whether these aircrafts were fitted with new engines or they were old engine aircrafts; and

(c) what steps are being taken to ensure safety of aircrafts and pilots?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI GEORGE FERNANDES): (a) There were two category-I accidents of MiG-21 aircraft on 9th September, 2002. These accidents are in the process of investigation by Courts of Inquiry. The findings of the COIs would alone reveal the causes of these accidents.

(b) Both the new and overhauled engines have usable life. The aircraft involved in crashes on 9.9.2002 were fitted with serviceable engines.

(c) A continuous and multi-faceted effort is always a foot in Indian Air Force to enhance and upgrade flight safety. Measures to enhance the quality of training to improve the skill levels, ability to exercise sound

judgement and situational awareness of pilots are being pursued. Constant interaction with Hindustan Aeronautics Limited and Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs) of concerned countries is also maintained to overcome the technical defects of aircraft.

Indian PoWs in Pakistani Jails

2119. SHRI RAJEEV SHUKLA: Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Pakistan in a statement stated that it has not found any Indian Prisoner of Wars (PoWs) in any of its jails in a renewed search made after a request by Government of India at the Agra Summit;

(b) if so, whether Indian Government has insisted on a thorough investigation into the whereabouts of 54 Prisoners of Wars (PoWs) believed to be languishing in Pakistani jails;

(c) whether any modalities for a visit to Pakistan by the relatives of the missing PoWs has been worked; and

(d) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI GEORGE FERNANDES): (a) to (d) In response to the matter raised by the Prime Minister at Agra Summit, the Government of Pakistan, in September, 2001, intimated that it had conducted an 'exhaustive search' and scrutiny of jail records throughout the country to ascertain whether any Indian PoW from 1971 war was still held anywhere in Pakistan. It added that fresh investigations had once again confirmed the earlier results that no Indian PoW from 1971 war was held in any jail in Pakistan.

Pakistan had offered to receive a delegation of the families of PoWs, Government has had consultations with the relatives' Association of the PoWs in this regard. Suggestions put forth by the Association are being considered viz-a-viz Pakistani proposal as also the most opportune time for taking the process further.

Joint Indo-US Exercise in Alaska

2120. SHRIMATI VANGA GEETHA: Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether paratroopers of the Indian Army participated in joint exercises with the US army in Alaska, US in the month of October, 2002;